

Coyotes in the Cuyahoga Valley



The sound of a coyote howl echoing in the darkness or a quick glimpse of a coyote as it pounces on mice in a field can create a strong reaction. From awe, excitement, and appreciation to fear, anger, and uncertainty, the range of reaction is extensive. The coyote is revered by American Indians who tell tales of this creature as the Supreme Being and incorporate its intelligence and trickiness into their stories. It is maligned by sheep ranchers who suffer losses when coyote prey on livestock and coexists with other farmers who benefit from reduced rodent populations when coyotes "mouse" their property.

The coyote is admired for its ability to adapt and thrive despite decades of extensive hunting and population control. In many ways it is this success and adaptability that have allowed the coyote to forge a place in the ecosystem of Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Coyote Characteristics

Many behaviors exhibited by coyotes are precisely what has allowed them to exist in areas as diverse as Yellowstone National Park, Los Angeles, Central Park in New York, and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. They are generally elusive and many people who observe them get no more than a glimpse in their headlights as a coyote crosses their path. Coyotes are also primarily nocturnal, with peak activity occurring at dusk and dawn, thereby avoiding interactions with people. Observations suggest that as coyotes become accustomed to humans, daytime activity is increasing.

In Ohio, coyotes live in a social unit made up of an adult pair and their young. They do not form packs beyond this social unit. Coyotes will defend territory against intruding coyotes, foxes, and dogs.

Coyotes use a variety of vocalizations to communicate with one another. Howls, yelps, barks, growls, and squeals are common. Coyotes are most often heard around dawn and dusk, but external triggers such as train whistles and emergency vehicle sirens may generate a response.

Coyote Versus Dog Identification

When spotting an animal in the distance take note of the following key identifiers:

Coyotes travel with their bushy, black-tipped tail pointed down, dogs carry

Coyotes have an elongated snout.

Coyotes have dark fur on lower forelegs.

Coyotes have a perfect step pattern, dropping their hind paw in the track left by the front paw.

Coyotes tend to travel a straight path while dogs tend to meander.

Fast Facts	
Activity:	Primarily from dusk to dawn
Color:	Varies from pale yellowish grey to reddish to almost black
Size:	Approx. 1 ½ - 2 ft high at shoulder; 3 ½ - 4 ft long plus tail
Weight:	25 - 45 pounds
Habitat:	Woods, old fields, brushy hill areas
Diet:	Mice, rabbits, and other small animals, carrion, fruit, and trash
Mating:	January through April
Gestation:	58 - 63 days
Litter Size:	5-7 pups
Scat:	Similar to dog scat but contains hair and can appear chalky

Coyotes in CVNP

Although coyotes are currently found throughout the United States, prior to 1900 their numbers were sparse in the east. Beginning with Ohio's first coyote sighting in 1919, coyotes have gradually spread throughout the state and inhabit all 88 counties.

Shortly after staff and visitors in CVNP began sighting coyotes, the park began a survey to determine the overall population of coyotes and monitor changes. Beginning in 1993, a study method that uses recorded coyote calls to elicit a response from other coyotes has been used. In the ten years of data, coyote numbers have fluctuated between a low of 40 animals to a high of just over 100 (see figure 1).

By summer of 2005, CVNP plans to be actively engaged in a project that uses radio tracking devices to monitor the activities of collared coyotes. Radio-

collaring of coyotes will be used to obtain additional information on the basic distribution and abundance of resident coyotes. It will also be used to determine how much time coyotes are spending in the park and to what degree they wander onto neighboring lands.

By combining data from these studies and results of local research investigating coyote diet, CVNP will develop a Coyote Management Plan and will be better equipped to educate visitors and neighbors about the status of coyote in the valley.

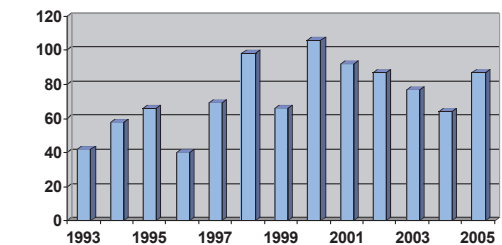


Figure 1: Estimated Coyote Population in CVNP. No study conducted in 1997.

Coyotes and People

Coyotes do pose some risk to small pets. This risk can increase in winter months when significant snow cover makes small rodents more difficult for coyotes to hunt. Although very rare, coyote have also been known to bite humans. Frequency of coyote conflicts with both pets and humans often intensifies in April and May when adult coyotes are protecting their young. This April, Ohio recorded the first bite of a human by a coyote.

Coyotes, like any warm-blooded animal, can carry rabies. This was true of the coyoteinvolved in the April incident, making it Ohio’s first recorded case of rabies in a coyote. Coyote are susceptible to several rabies strains including a raccoon-strain rabies that has created concern during a recent outbreak in northeast Ohio. As in 2004, CVNP is cooperating with the Ohio Departments of Health, Agriculture, and Natural Resources to allow distribution of oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits within the park in an effort to stop further spread of rabies in the area. The ORV is masked by fishmeal and oil that is eaten by raccoons, thereby vaccinating them. ORV baits also been shown to be eaten by coyote and fox.

The key element in preventing conflict with coyote is to prevent them from becoming habituated to people and to avoid having them identify humans as a potential supplier of food.

Tips for Homeowners

- Don't feed coyotes intentionally.
 - Don't make your yards attractive to coyotes by leaving pet food, garbage, bird feed, or compost exposed.
 - Accompany small pets and children while outside.
 - Cats should be kept indoors.
 - Regularly clean outdoor grills.
 - Nuisance coyotes can be harassed with loud noises such as shouting, throwing rocks, or spraying them with a garden hose to encourage them to avoid your property.
- Tips for Park Visitors**
- Treat coyotes and all wildlife with respect.
 - Keep dogs on leash.
 - Do not approach coyote or other wildlife.

For More Information

Cuyahoga Valley National Park presents several programs each year that focus on coyotes and their status in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. For the date of the next scheduled program, contact Canal Visitor Center at (216) 524-1497.



Front Foot

